

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

What is claimed is:

1. (currently amended) A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:

~~initiating a print task;~~

~~transmitting said~~ receiving a print task to ~~at~~ a print system component;

receiving a cluster printing selection at said print system component;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data; and

dividing and distributing said spool data among a plurality of printing devices with said print system component, said dividing and distributing comprising parallel playback of spool data to multiple printer drivers; ~~and~~

~~providing load balancing between said plurality of printing devices.~~

2. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing and said distributing comprise job splitting.

3. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing and said distributing comprise copy splitting.

4. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said ~~providing~~ load-balancing comprises obtaining printer capability data from said plurality of printing devices.

5. (original) The method of claim 4 wherein said printer capability data comprises a rate at which at least one of said plurality of printing devices prints pages.

6. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing, said distributing and said ~~providing~~ load-balancing comprise dividing said print task among said plurality of printing devices according to the speed of each printing device.

7. (original) The method of claim 1 further comprising querying at least one printing device to determine at least one of its capabilities.

8. (original) The method of claim 1 further comprising querying at least one printing device to determine its availability.

9. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing, said distributing and said ~~providing~~-load-balancing comprise dividing said print task, when said print task comprises multiple copies of a print job, into sets of copies of said print job, each of said sets comprising a number of copies substantially proportional to the number of pages per minute (PPM) each printer can print.

10. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing, said distributing and said ~~providing~~-load-balancing comprise dividing said print task, when said print task comprises multiple and distinct print jobs, into sets of distinct print jobs, each of said sets comprising a number of pages substantially proportional to the number of pages per minute (PPM) each printer can print.

11. (currently amended) A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:

~~initiating a print task;~~

~~transmitting said~~ receiving a print task to a print system component;

receiving a cluster printing selection at said print system component;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices; and

despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said print task to said multiple printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said multiple printing device's output capacity.

~~determining said printing devices' capabilities; and~~

~~dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the capabilities of said printing devices, using said print system component.~~

12. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises querying a local printer through a system bus.

13. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises querying a network printer using a network communications protocol.

14. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises querying a printer driver.

15. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises accessing a printer attribute registry.

16. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said print system component comprises a print processor.

17. (currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises estimating the capability of some of said ~~plurality of~~ multiple printing devices.

18. (currently amended) A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:

~~initiating a print task;~~

~~transmitting said~~ receiving a print task to a print system component;

receiving a cluster printing selection at said print system component;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

modifying said spool data according to said cluster printing selection;

determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices; and

despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said print task to said multiple printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said multiple printing device's output capacity.

~~determining said printing devices' capabilities; and~~

~~dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the throughput of each of said printing devices, using said print system component.~~

19. (currently amended) The method of claim 18 wherein said ~~throughput~~ output capacity comprises a printer's speed in PPM.

20. (currently amended) The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said ~~throughput~~ output capacity comprises a determination of a printing device's disk storage capacity.

21. (currently amended) The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said ~~throughput~~ output capacity comprises an analysis of a printing device's rasterization pipeline.

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said ~~throughput~~ output capacity comprises an evaluation of alternative rasterization methods and a selection of the fastest method for a specific print task.

23. (currently amended) A printing system ~~component~~ for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said ~~component~~ system comprising:

a print task receiver for receiving a print task;

a cluster selection receiver for receiving a cluster printing selection;

a combiner for combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

a transmitter for transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

a driver for creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

a modifier for modifying said spool data according to said cluster printing selection;

a capacity determiner for determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices; and

a despooler for despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said print task to said multiple printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said multiple printing device's output capacity.

~~a determiner for determining printing device capabilities;~~

~~a divider for dividing a print task into print sets, said sets being proportioned according to the capabilities of each printing device in said plurality of printing devices; and~~

~~a distributor for distributing said sets to each printing device in said plurality of printing devices.~~

24. (currently amended) A computer-readable medium comprising instructions for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said instructions comprising the acts of:

~~initiating a print task;~~

~~transmitting said~~ receiving a print task to a print system component;

receiving a cluster printing selection at said print system component;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

modifying said spool data according to said cluster printing selection;

determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices; and

despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said print task to said multiple printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said multiple printing device's output capacity.

~~determining said printing devices' capabilities; and~~

~~dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the capabilities of said printing devices, using said print system component.~~

25. (currently amended) A computer data signal embodied in an electronic transmission, said signal having the function of distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said signal comprising instructions for:

~~initiating a print task;~~

~~transmitting said~~ receiving a print task to a print system component;

receiving a cluster printing selection at said print system component;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

modifying said spool data according to said cluster printing selection;

determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices; and

despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said print task to said multiple printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said multiple printing device's output capacity.

~~determining said printing devices' capabilities; and~~

~~dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the capabilities of said printing devices, using said print system component.~~